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Solis-Cohen, Solomon  
The Jewish Theological  
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# THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

## PAST AND FUTURE

ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE  
TWENTY-FIFTH ANNUAL COMMENCE-  
MENT, NEW YORK, JUNE 2, 1918

BY

Solomon Solis Cohen, M.D.  
OF PHILADELPHIA



NEW YORK  
THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA  
1919





# The Jewish Theological Seminary Past and Future

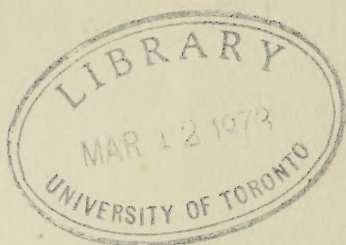
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### PAST AND FUTURE

When—a few weeks ago—my friend, fellow student and fellow worker, the Acting President of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, asked me to tell the friends, workers and students of the Seminary, here today assembled, something of its founding and its founders, I realized with almost sudden sharpness that a generation has passed since the Seminary came into existence. New workers have arisen, new friends have been made, new students have entered, of whom perhaps it may not be said that “they know not Joseph”—but to whom Joseph is a name, rather than a memory. It is to them, especially, that I am asked to speak.

Three and thirty years ago, the young men and some of the elders of my generation rallied around a great leader—my revered teacher, Sabato Morais of blessed memory—to work toward the realization of a great vision. The vision was not new, for men of an earlier generation had also beheld it and worked toward its actualization. With God’s blessing, it was our happiness to see the dream partially fulfilled.

To understand and appreciate the impelling influences that culminated in the establishment



of the Seminary, we must know something of the environment of spiritual conflict amid which it came into being. To realize the duty that it undertook, and the still greater duty that is before it, as before the elders and young men of the present generation, we must "ask of the days that were." To glimpse the fullness of the vision in part realized, we must look back upon periods even earlier than the November of 1885 when Morais declared that without longer delay a College for the conservation of Judaism and Jewish learning in America must arise upon an enduring foundation.

It is nearly a hundred years—I cannot give the exact date, but may by collateral evidence place it as not earlier than 1818, not later than 1824 or 1825—since the first public proposition of which I have knowledge, was made, concerning Jewish academic education in America. What may have gone before that, I cannot say. I have not had time to search public records or private correspondence. Doubtless Asser Levy and his friends, and Samuel Jackson and his friends, and the Seixases, and the Gomezes, also had their dreams—but apparently the first public expression on the subject is found in an undated circular letter issued—say about 1822—by Jacob da Silva Solis, of Mount Pleasant, Westchester County, New York. He urges upon his co-religionists the necessity for the Jewish education of their children and proposes



the establishment of what we should now call a co-educational high school or academy, to teach Agriculture and Mechanical Arts to boys, and Domestic Science and Industry to girls, at the same time that they receive instruction in the fundamentals of an English education, in the Hebrew language and in the Jewish religion, and live in a Jewish home.

So far as I can learn, that suggestion received no practical support, although it included the offer of a tract of twenty acres of good farm land at Mount Pleasant (now Pleasantville) for the site of the proposed institution. When we recall that there were at the time not 2500 Jews in New York City, and probably less than 4000 in the whole United States, this is perhaps not to be wondered at. With the untimely death of my grandfather, his project dropped out of sight, and its only memorial is the circular that I have deposited with the Historical Society.

In 1843, Mordecai M. Noah wrote to Isaac Leeser a letter published in one of the early issues of *The Occident*, reviving an earlier proposal of his own for a college or school, "where children of the Jewish faith could obtain a classical education, and at the same time be properly instructed in the Hebrew language; where they could live in conformity with our laws, and acquire a liberal knowledge of the principles of their religion."

Mr. Leeser, if he did not, as was his wont, inspire this letter, at all events took the matter up actively; but again, nothing eventuated.

In 1848, just 70 years ago, the first step was taken. The Hebrew Education Society of Philadelphia was founded—Isaac Leeser its moving force, and Solomon da Silva Solis (son of Jacob da Silva Solis) its first president. It aimed to give what Noah had suggested—a liberal general education, beginning at the foundation and going to the very top; and therewith, instruction in the Hebrew language, literature and religion. That Society is still in existence, teaching Hebrew and the Jewish religion to children, and teaching others—in part, at least—the mechanical arts and domestic science and industry. Through its touch with the Baron de Hirsch Fund and the Woodbine School, it may also be said to be in relation with the teaching of agriculture. Its English department, after some thirty-odd years of honorable activity, during which it trained some of the men and women later most prominent in civic life and in the charitable and educational work of Philadelphia's Jewry, was, and remains for the present, suspended.

Although this department did not develop, as originally purposed, into a College of Arts and Sciences, its work within the attainable limits was of a character to command the official recognition of the Board of Education of Philadelphia, so that



its graduates—boys and girls alike—were admitted into the city's High Schools, not only on a parity with those of the public Grammar Schools, but, in some instances, to advanced standing. It may be of interest, in passing, to note in the list of those who, at one or another time, have taught in the Hebrew Department, three names intimately connected with one or the other period of the life of this Seminary. I will give them in order of seniority—Mayer Sulzberger, Solomon Solis Cohen, Cyrus Adler.

Section 3 of the charter of the Hebrew Education Society, granted in 1849, says:

“It shall also be lawful for the said corporation to establish, whenever their funds will permit the same to be done, a superior seminary of learning within the limits of this commonwealth, the faculty of which seminary shall have power to furnish to graduates and others the usual degrees of Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, Doctor of Law and Doctor of Divinity, as the same is exercised by other colleges established in this commonwealth.”

In other words, it was given almost the same powers that reside in the University of Pennsylvania. Only on the side of technical education in the Applied Sciences is the grant of full University powers lacking. “Natural Philosophy”, however, was considered fully within its scope, for Mr. Lee-

ser, in his comment published in *The Occident* of October, 1849, said:

“It will be seen by Section 3, that we are empowered to establish a college, in the full sense of the word, for the teaching of Hebrew literature *in connection with the sciences*,\* within the limits of the Commonwealth, not confining us even to this city. Of course, the provision was introduced only for the future, as at present we have not the means of making use of the privilege. We have asked for it merely that we might have before us a high aim to be attained hereafter. It is left to the Israelites of America to say whether it shall be merely a legislative grant, or be employed for the advancement of their religious interests.”

In 1867, Maimonides College was organized as the Divinity Department of the school thus authorized. A faculty was constituted, embracing Isaac Leiser, Sabato Morais, Marcus Jastrow, A. Bettelheim, L. Bittenwieser—and later, Hayim Polano and George Jacobs—men, it will be seen, fully equipped to teach the branches respectively assigned to them.

This college had but a short existence. Mr. Leiser, who was made Provost, died before it was thoroughly in operation, and was succeeded by Dr.

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\*The Italics are mine.—S. S. C.



Jastrow, who, with those mentioned, continued it for some six years and until it had graduated four Rabbis. Its president—the president, at the time, of the Hebrew Education Society—was Moses A. Dropsie. He bitterly resented the failure of the material aid promised from other cities and especially from the city of New York. When the Jewish Theological Seminary was, later, established, Morais, with statesmanlike wisdom, chose New York as its domicile. That choice prevented the Seminary from receiving the full measure of support that Mr. Dropsie might otherwise have given to it; and when, by will, the former president of Maimonides College provided for the noble institution of learning that now bears his name, it was distinctly stipulated that this academy or college should rise within the corporate limits of Philadelphia.

Near Dropsie College, in Philadelphia, there stands a somewhat more modest building called Gratz College. In 1854, Hyman Gratz executed a deed of trust whereby, at the death of a certain beneficiary in 1892, there fell to the Congregation Mikveh Israel a trust fund of about \$200,000, for the establishment in the County of Philadelphia, of “a college for the education of Jews.” The sum, great though it was at the time the deed of trust was made, is insufficient for a College of Arts conducted according to modern standards, and the

Congregation, with the consent of court and the approval of the Gratz heirs, uses it to maintain a College for the training of Jewish Teachers—the first institution of the kind to be established in America.

This College has been in active operation since 1896; but its formal opening was preceded in 1895 by a special course of lectures on “Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology” given by a certain Dr. S. Schechter. A number of its graduates have continued their studies, and fitted themselves for the Rabbinate, at this Seminary.

Parenthetically, it may be stated that the income derived from the Gratz Trust is already inadequate to the support of the enlarged activities of the College—especially its School of Practice—and has to be supplemented by grants from the Congregation and other sources familiar to the Trustees of institutions of Jewish learning!

It is interesting to note that Mr. Gratz was a friend of Isaac Leeser's. He was treasurer of the Congregation of which Mr. Leeser, and afterwards Dr. Morais, was the minister; a Congregation that had for its first ordained minister that ardent patriot (whom it shared with Shearith Israel of New York) Gershom Mendes Seixas; while among its early members were men who aided greatly the cause of the American Revolution—such as Haym Salomon and Simon Nathan (also “refugee” New Yorkers) Hayman Levy and the elder Gratzes.



In 1875, the Hebrew Union College was established at Cincinnati by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations—that is practically to say by Isaac M. Wise. Although that College was distinctly organized as a “Reform” institution, and by the most active protagonist of “Reform” in the United States, I remember very well that Mr. Morais labored year after year, although always in vain, with the secular heads of the Congregation Mikveh Israel, to induce it to join the Union—doubtless in the hope that the influence of that Congregation and of others of like thought might be brought to bear on the Union College, and at least moderate its antinomian tendencies. As events have shown, the effort would have proved futile. Perhaps, in this instance, the laymen were wiser than their minister.

It would be as unwise as ungracious, to revive the acerbities of polemics happily forgotten—and I have no such intention. Yet certain facts need to be stated frankly and clearly. The Seminary has consistently declined to label itself “Orthodox,” “Conservative,” or anything but Jewish; and from the first, and of deliberate intent, “combative controversies” have been excluded from its atmosphere. But its position has been quite plain under both its Presidents.

Thus, Dr. Schechter, in his address at the dedi-

cation of the new buildings of the Hebrew Union College, a few years ago, wittily alluding to the custom of the British Cabinet to speak of the other party as "His Majesty's Opposition," said:

"If I were in agreement with you, I should have been deprived of the pleasure of being here today; at least in the capacity of President of another college pursuing, to a certain extent, different aims, and endeavoring to realize them by largely different methods . . . Of course, it will always be a question of which is which; we Conservatives maintaining that we are His Majesty's Government, and you His Majesty's Opposition. But this is one of the differences. For reduce our differences as much as you want, and, indeed, I hope and pray that the difference of aims is not so deep as we sometimes think, the fact remains that we are unfortunately divided both in questions of doctrine—at least certain doctrines—and even more in practice."

Leeser, in speaking of the foundation of Maimonides College, had written:

"Some may object to the movement, that it is not pledged to either reform or orthodoxy. These hateful words are always at hand when anything is to be done, from the election of a secretary to a society, to printing a book or establishing a college. The illiberal always



ask: To what party does he or it belong? For our part, strange as it may sound, we belong to no party. We commenced life with certain convictions and have not swerved from them. We know only Judaism; and if you call it 'orthodox,' you do so—not we."

Morais repeatedly expressed the same thought in nearly the same words.

However, between "Reformed Judaism" and the Judaism of the unreformed, deep differences do exist; and in the early eighties of the last century, much had occurred in this country to accentuate them. The Russian immigration was not without its effect—but that is too large a subject to elaborate here. Note must be made of but one event—an event that greatly influenced the subsequent history of Jewish education in the United States.

In November, 1885, after much preliminary discussion and preparation, a conference of militant reform and radical leaders, many of them intimately connected with the Hebrew Union College, assembled at Pittsburgh. The "Pittsburgh Conference," as it came to be called, issued a "platform" which, in Dr. David Philipson's comprehensive and scholarly History of the "Reform Movement," published within recent years, is said to remain "the clearest and most authoritative exposition of reform principles." It contained a

number of "planks," some of which expressed a broad liberalism and lofty universalism, or were concerned with social justice. With these, no one especially quarreled, however much their phraseology, and in part their content, seemed open to criticism in the cold light of fact.

But two or three others raised a storm of protest.

One seemed to affirm the equal validity of all creeds known among men, and its peculiar use of the phrase "God-idea" was taken—let us say *mistaken*—to imply a denial, not only of Revelation, but even of God's existence.

Other pronouncements shocked and antagonized all who held to the validity of the ceremonial laws and to the sanctifying power of the historic rites and immemorial customs of the House of Israel. It was not so much the formal repudiation of these laws and rites, "Mosaic and Rabbinic," as having "originated in ages and under ideas entirely foreign to our present mental and physical state"—that aroused indignation. Such sapiences had a familiar sound and had long since ceased to annoy. But new offense was found in the declarations, seemingly an echo of current anti-Semitic propaganda, that these rites and ceremonies "fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness" and that "their observance in our day is apt to obstruct, rather than to further, modern spiritual elevation."

Here, indeed, was a gage of battle, that self-respecting teachers and adherents of the law and life thus challenged, could not ignore.

Of course, any hope of the restoration of Zion or the re-establishment of a Jewish State, was also repudiated.

Followed, a period of lively controversy. The Jewish, and to some extent, the secular press, published interviews, comments, addresses, letters, on both sides, but chiefly in defense of the positions assailed at Pittsburgh. *The Jewish Record* of Philadelphia, in commenting on this, said editorially:

“The cause of this widespread revolt is not so much the words of the platform itself, as the incendiary utterances in discussion, illuminating those words.”

Certain Congregations, classed as “Conservative”—which, despite the introduction of organs and family pews in their Synagogues and Temples, were still influenced by Rabbis such as Jastrow, Szold, Kohut, Henry S. Jacobs, de Sola Mendes, Chumaceiro and Aaron Wise, who taught and practised the Jewish life and acknowledged the authority of the oral law—withdrew or considered the withdrawal of their support from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Union College.



In *The Jewish Record* of November 27th, 1885, sermons and interviews of many ministers and laymen are reported, and Mr. Morais is thus quoted:

“The only possible means to save the ancestral religion both in its moral and ceremonial tenets, is the establishment of a college in the East by a purely conservative element. Its guiding rules, its supervision, its teachings, should be altogether conservative.”

Mr. Morais, the reporter goes on to say: “acknowledged that Philadelphia might not offer all the encouragement needful for so important an undertaking; but he thought that New York might give it a stronger impulse and expressed a wish that the Shearith Israel Congregation might take the initiative.”

On November 26th, 1885, Morais had addressed a letter to David M. Piza, of New York, in which he says:

“The best arms of defense against the men opposed to historical Judaism are faith and erudition. These cannot be acquired except in schools under the guidance and supervision of well qualified persons.”

In this letter, he again urges action by the Congregation Shearith Israel, to which he thinks

he can promise an active seconding by members of his own Congregation.

In December, 1885, Rev. Dr. H. Pereira Mendes, minister of Shearith Israel, issued an appeal to its members to take part in the movement; enclosing in his communication the Morais-Piza letter and an extract from an editorial article in *The Jewish Record* of December 11, which "from internal evidence" appears to have been written by me.

Meanwhile, Dr. Cyrus Adler had written from Johns Hopkins University, where he was then a Fellow—a young fellow—to *The American Hebrew*, supporting "the plea of [his] teacher [Morais] for the establishment of a Conservative College in New York."

In the editorial columns of *The American Hebrew* appeared trenchant articles from the pen of Max Cohen, and perhaps the pens of others. I am at liberty to praise these articles, for although at the time an active member of the Editorial Board of *The American Hebrew*, I cannot recognize my own unadulterated style in any of them! I seem to have used our Philadelphia journal, *The Jewish Record*, instead.

The veteran editor of *The Jewish Record*, Mr. Alfred T. Jones, a notable figure in the history of Jewish journalism in this country—

and who, if I mistake not, had been one of the founders of the Hebrew Education Society and a Trustee of Maimonides College—not only placed his columns freely at our disposal, but also himself wrote strongly in support of the proposed college.

He was one of that remarkable succession of able men and women who, from decade to decade, during the forty years of Isaac Leeser's activity, grouped themselves about that foremost figure of American Jewish history, and greatly aided in the organization and development of Jewish public life and Jewish education in the United States. Solomon Solis, Hyman Gratz, Moses A. Dropsie—each represented by an existing and active school of elementary or advanced learning—have been cited; and there are many others who should be named in any extended historical study. To them we owe not only the institutions spoken of, but also the "Hebrew Sunday School" movement, which began with the work of Rebecca Gratz in Philadelphia in 1838; the "Board of Delegates of American Israelites," founded in 1859 and constituting the first formal union of the scattered forces of American Jewry; the first "American Jewish Publication Society," established in 1845; and many other movements which cannot here be detailed.

The direct influence of this body of earnest



workers did not die with Leeser, fifty years ago. Even to this day its impress is felt in the Seminary and other institutions through the youngest of the close friends of the Master, still working actively among us—the youth whom Leeser, with unerring judgment, recognized as his destined successor in Jewish public affairs—the man who did most to bring about the extension of the Seminary and its establishment upon a strong material, as well as spiritual foundation—Judge Mayer Sulzberger.

My own recollections of Mr. Leeser cover about five years; his last—my second—lustrum. They are those of an impressionable child, unconsciously modified in detail, perhaps, by later knowledge, and in part dimmed by the lapse of years. Yet despite that long lapse of a half-century, they are in essentials vivid, distinct, and I doubt not, true.

They concern the familiar friend of the home, whose presence there was as natural as that of parents or brothers, whose absence from the Sabbath board left the joys of the day incomplete. He was elder than one's parents, for his hair was silver white; yet—for there were other white-haired friends—something more than the respect due to age, mingled with the love that parents and older brothers showed him. Later, when polysyllabic

words ceased to deter, and one read avidly books, papers, magazines—whatever came to hand—one saw the name “Isaac Leeser” prefixed by the letters “REV.” and learned that this meant “reverend.” The dictionary gave the explanation—and so the fabric woven of my memories of a chieftain in Israel bears the knotted fringe of affection and the blue thread of reverence.

As I look upon that fringe, picture after picture rises before my mental vision. Of them, I venture to choose two for presentation here—for in epitomizing Leeser’s impress upon one developing soul, they illustrate his lasting influence upon many—even of generations yet to come. They are the earliest and the latest of my memories of the man who, without assistance and with but limited support, gave to English-speaking Jews a translation of the Bible at once faithful, vigorous and idiomatic.

In the first picture, a child of five, perhaps six years—not more, for my father is in it—I am walking home from Synagogue between him and Mr. Leeser, holding a hand of each. As we pass a certain garden that I can still identify, a remark of one of them permits me to explode the question that for ever so many minutes has been burning my lips: “Were they big lions or baby ones in the pit with Daniel?” From which we may infer that the “discourse, argumentative and devotional,”

of that Sabbath morning, had taken for its theme the faith that fears not.

The workings of a child's mind in framing that query I will not attempt to trace; but the origin and purpose of the smiling—not laughing—answer, which alone is important, are quite clear. I do not pretend to recall its exact words—but their purport I have never forgotten: "You'll find that out when you come to read the Bible in Hebrew."

The other picture holds no smiles. Mr. Leeser is seated in his study—he seems wan and worn. Other figures are there, but they are vague. There is a background of books, and he has a book in his hand. The other hand rests upon my head. I have been sent to his rooms with some delicacy for an invalid, some message of affection, and he has had me brought to him. What else was said I do not remember, but these words live: "Tell your mother I am about the same, and give her my love. And, Solomon, go on with your Hebrew."

"Study the Bible. Go on with your Hebrew." Such were the first and the last of Isaac Leeser's remembered injunctions.

As the years go by, they lose their personal character and become a charge to the whole community to make it possible for every Jewish lad and lass in America to do these things.



Which, naturally, brings us back to the Seminary—or takes us, perhaps, beyond it.

Let me not give a false impression. With or without the Pittsburgh Conference, the Seminary was bound to come. Some of us had determined upon that; and in one way or another, we should have found means to bring it to pass.

Meanwhile, there were delays—hindrances—difficulties.

It was necessary to fuse in the crucible of a common purpose, elements of the American Jewish community that had been held apart by differences which we did not then, and I will not now, minimize. Chiefly, however, they concerned opinion rather than doctrine, liturgy rather than life, and Morais, the statesman, was willing to disregard such differences in face of the greater issues to be served by union.

But lesser men found it hard to take the same broad view, and there was wanted something to kindle that fervor of enthusiasm which alone could burn away doubt and prejudice and misunderstanding, and bring obdurate mentalities to the melting point. The Pittsburgh Conference supplied the needed spark.

“Pins,” wrote the schoolboy in his composition, “is a very useful article. They have saved many lives.”

“How is that, Thomas?” asked the teacher—  
“How do pins save lives?”

The answer was ready: “*By not swallowing them.*”

Recurring, now, to December, 1885: Beside the published letters quoted or referred to, personal correspondence, unpublished, was also active among a small group of ministers and laymen; and a number of unreported conferences were held. Particularly—unless my recollection is faulty—was there an active exchange of views between Mr. Morais and the Rev. Dr. Alexander Kohut of New York, whose aggressive use of great learning and thrilling eloquence in support of Jewish law and tradition had, indeed, been one of the factors leading—by reaction—to the Pittsburgh Conference.

*The Jewish Record* of January 22, 1886, reports that a conference of ministers and laymen had been held in New York that week, at which “the Rev. Sabato Morais was authorized to issue a circular letter to every member and seatholder of Congregations in the eastern and middle states, asking for large contributions for the establishment and maintenance of a seat of learning where Biblical and Talmudic learning may be taught and Jewish ministers may be reared in accordance with the tenets of historical Judaism, for the preservation of which it will be their duty to labor.”

This circular letter marks the formal beginning of the institution whose thirty-third year and twenty-fifth commencement we celebrate today. It was issued over the signatures of S. Morais, Alexander Kohut, H. Pereira Mendes, F. de Sola Mendes, Bernard Drachman, and A. P. Mendes. To further its purpose, it summoned a meeting of ministers to be held on Sunday, January 31st, 1886, in New York City.

That meeting duly assembled in the vestry rooms of the Congregation Shearith Israel. In addition to the signers of the circular, there were present Rev. Dr. H. W. Schneeberger of Baltimore, Rev. J. H. Chumaceiro of Philadelphia, and three laymen, Messrs. Weil, Davidson and Mayer. By resolution, the ministers present were constituted the Executive Committee of the "Jewish Theological Seminary of New York," with Rev. S. Morais as President and Rev. Dr. H. Pereira Mendes as Secretary; and the first Sunday of October, 1886, was named as the day for the opening of the Seminary. Congregations in sympathy with the movement were invited to send clerical and lay delegates to an organization meeting to be held on March 7, 1886.

The convention thus provoked—to use the good old English word—was held at the Nineteenth Street Synagogue on the day fixed. A number of congregations of Philadelphia, New York, Bal-



timore, Newark and elsewhere were represented. Rev. S. Morais called the delegates to order but declined to preside over their session, and that honor—for it was an honor, and one of the few that I remember and cherish—fell to me. The Constitution that had been prepared\* for The Jewish Theological Seminary Association of America was in due form adopted, and we adjourned until May 9th, for the election of Trustees.†

But we had done one significant thing. The ministers had issued a call for the founding of *The Jewish Theological Seminary of New York*. We founded, instead, THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA.

The Seminary did not open as planned, in October, 1886, but held its first session January 2, 1887.

Meanwhile, the Trustees and the ministers had been active. Mr. Morais, in particular, had ob-

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\*The first draft was written by me, and after revision in conference with Samuel Morais Hyneman and Emanuel Cohen, Esqs., the document was submitted to Mr. Morais for his approval and that of his clerical colleagues—so that all was ready when the convention assembled. The Committee on Constitution appointed by the Chairman of the Convention and which presented the report agreed upon, consisted of Rev. Bernard Drachman, Rev. F. de Sola Mendes and Rev. H. P. Mendes, and the Committee to have the Constitution and By-laws printed consisted of F. de Sola Mendes, D. M. Piza and Cyrus L. Sulzberger, to whom the Chairman and Secretary were added.

†The following constituted the first Board of Trustees: Joseph Blumenthal, Newman Cowen, Tucker David, J. M. Emanuel, Isaac Fles, Sender Jarmulowsky, Nathan Levin, J. E. Newburger, J. Edgar Phillips, D. M. Piza and Isador Rosenthal of New York; Dr. S. Solis Cohen and S. M. Hyneman of Philadelphia, and Dr. A. Friedenwald of Baltimore.

tained a number of substantial subscriptions and many smaller ones, in Philadelphia and New York. But all of us were still asking for more. The habit, I believe, has been continued by our successors "even to this day."

Local branches of the Seminary Association had been established, or were in process of establishment, in Philadelphia, Baltimore and elsewhere. Mr. Morais had been appointed Professor of Bible and President of the Faculty; Dr. Kohut, Professor of Talmud; Dr. Drachman, Preceptor in Bible History and Hebrew; Dr. G. Lieberman, Preceptor in Mishna and Gemara; and an Advisory Board of Ministers had been constituted as follows:

Rev. S. Morais, Philadelphia;  
Rev. Dr. A. Kohut, New York;  
Rev. Dr. M. Jastrow, Philadelphia;  
Rev. A. P. Mendes, Newport, R. I.;  
Rev. H. S. Jacobs, New York;  
Rev. Dr. F. de Sola Mendes, New York;  
Rev. Dr. Aaron Wise, New York;  
Rev. Dr. H. W. Schneeberger, Baltimore;  
Rev. Dr. H. P. Mendes, New York;  
Rev. Dr. B. Drachman, New York.

Later, Rev. Dr. B. Szold of Baltimore, accepted appointment to this Board.

The Seminary Committee, of which I had the

*mitzvah* to be Chairman, had, under the guidance of the Faculty and Advisory Board, outlined a comprehensive curriculum calling for a Preparatory Department, a Junior Class and a Senior Class—the whole course taking nine years to complete; four years in the Senior Class alone. A Preparatory Class of ten members had been admitted.

The same year, a course of summer lectures was begun, in which members of the Advisory Board and other scholars took part. Among the lecturers was Dr. Cyrus Adler of Philadelphia and Baltimore, whose topic was Biblical Archaeology; and his name thereafter appears in the Faculty list as Preceptor in that subject.

The following year, two advanced students were admitted to the Junior Class, and in due time, through promotions and admissions of qualified students, the Senior Class was instituted.

In June, 1887, the University of Pennsylvania had conferred the degree of Doctor of Laws and Languages upon the Rev. Sabato Morais in recognition of his character, his learning, his services to the American Union and the cause of human freedom, and his position in the academic world. In 1890 there was a further recognition of the high scholastic standing of our young institution. Columbia College entered into the same relation



with the Seminary that existed between that University and other divinity schools in New York. Our students were thus permitted to obtain from Columbia their Masters' and Doctors' degrees in Arts and Philosophy, whilst continuing their theological studies. This comity of the two institutions received further emphasis in May, 1892, by the participation of the President of Columbia College, Hon. Seth Low, in the ceremonies attending the dedication of the new home of the Seminary at No. 736 Lexington Avenue.

On April 17, 1893, to mark the seventieth birthday of Dr. Morais, large additions were made to the Seminary Library, then numbering but about 1,000 volumes, and the whole collection was, by resolution of the Trustees, designated "The Morais Library."

Among the notable additions were some 3,000 books and manuscripts which had formed the working library of a famous scholar—Dr. David Cassel, of Berlin—and which included a number of rare works. An additional collection, contributed by the Messrs. Ottinger in honor of their father, was designated as "The Nathan Ottinger Section."

The Trustees, in their letter of congratulation to Dr. Morais, expressed the wish that "the Morais Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary" might

become "so valuable and important a collection of works in Hebrew Literature as to . . . constitute it the center of Hebrew learning and research in America, and indissolubly connect your name with the Institution you have founded, for time immemorial."

We had not the merit to attain the fulfillment of this wish. Our successors, however, have made the Seminary Library what we had hoped to make it—and have transferred the Founder's name to the Chair of Bible, entitling this the "Sabato Morais Professorship."

I will not pretend that the "Old Guard" was pleased with the change. Apart from this, however, the transfer was fitting—for few know the Bible as our Founder knew it; few can make its scenes so vividly present, its characters so pulsingly alive as he made them; few can teach as he taught, its eternal truths.

But Morais cared nothing for honors or memorials. If he thought of himself at all, it was but to echo the prayer of Nehemiah, "O God, remember unto me for good, what Thou hast put into my heart to do for this people."

To understand its further history, we must now separate in our minds, the Seminary—the institution of learning—the mighty answer of a mighty man to a mighty challenge—from the corporations,

the administrative bodies, by which it has been, at different periods, supported and directed.

I have outlined the foundation of the Jewish Theological Seminary Association of America in the early months of 1886. Its constituents were congregations and branch associations represented by voting delegates; and individual contributors, called members, without voting rights. It was incorporated by the State of New York, in the year 1887; but it never, curiously enough, incorporated the Seminary as such. A supplementary act in 1888 had allowed it to absorb another institution which should not be neglected in speaking of the history of Jewish education in this country.

Joseph Blumenthal, whose memory we should ever hold in love and honor, and to whom this institution owes more than can be told, was elected—I am glad to say, upon my nomination—the first President of the Seminary Association, and held that position until his lamented death on March 2, 1901. In a report to the Second Biennial Convention, he said:

“Mr. Sampson Simson, the founder and first President of the Mount Sinai Hospital, an active member of the Shearith Israel Congregation of New York, and known as a patron of many Jewish institutions, deeded in 1853 a piece of land, about four and one-half acres, lying just north of the city of Yonkers, to the Jewish



Theological Seminary and Scientific Institution. That organization, which at the time existed, and which for upwards of twenty years was kept intact through the efforts of the late Rev. J. J. Lyons, continued to hold this property until by an act of the Legislature of New York, May 10, 1888, it was consolidated with this Association, and the land therefore now becomes a portion of your assets."

If I do not mistake, this land is still held by the Seminary.

This, then, was one merger: The Jewish Theological Seminary Association acquired the powers of—note the implications of the title—The Jewish Theological Seminary *and Scientific Institution*.

Apparently, however, the latter had remained merely a paper organization—the expression of a pious hope. The Jewish Theological Seminary Association, on the contrary, had an active existence of sixteen years. During that time it maintained a Seminary, with a Faculty, active and advisory, comprising such names as Morais, Kohut, Mendes, Jastrow, Szold, Jacobs, Drachman, Adler, Davidson, Maisner, Lieberman, and others, and graduated some twenty well trained students, of whom all did, and most are still doing, work for religion and education in which we can take just pride.

The first graduating Class, in 1894, was not large. It consisted of one Joseph H. Hertz, who had been admitted to advanced standing in the first Preparatory Class and had thus been under the direct influence of Dr. Morais for seven precious, impressionable years. His graduation thesis upon Bachya's *Hoboth Halebaboht* was the beginning of the many scholarly contributions to Jewish literature by pupils of the Seminary.

Morais, like Schechter, came to America by way of England. We have made some return. Dr. Hertz is now the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain. Had we done nothing else with that little school, so rich in spirit, so poor in worldly goods, than to give the Jews of the British Empire one of their spiritual leaders, we had done something that was worth while.

It was upon Morais, however, that our school chiefly depended, and "to the wise and to the ignorant, there is one event." Immortality is of the spirit only. Often did I plead with my beloved teacher to grant himself a little rest. It was no small task for one of more than seventy years to go from Philadelphia to New York three times a week, returning on the same day—or rather, night—and to continue, as well, his duties with his Congregation and his teaching with his personal pupils in Philadelphia. But he preferred to die, as he lived, at God's work.

In his address before the meeting of the Seminary Association in 1892, when he was himself just entering upon his seventieth year, and had but lately recovered, as by a miracle, from a severe illness, Dr. Morais alluded to a High School for Jewish preachers which had recently been inaugurated at Vienna; and praised the foresight and liberality of the Viennese Jews in thus providing for the future. "The Jellineks," he said, "do not live forever."

At the next meeting in 1894, it was his sad duty to tell us of the death of Jellinek, and also of that of Chief Rabbi Mortara of Mantua—who, as an elder student, had sat with him at the feet of Haham Piperno of Livorno—and to pronounce eulogies on those great men. At the biennial meeting of 1896, he had to lament the death of Kohut. In 1898, Morais, too, had been gathered to his fathers. He died November 11th, 1897.

When Lincoln fell, Andrew Johnson said, "The Government at Washington still lives!" When Morais died, the Seminary fulfilled the prediction he had made at its first biennial convention in 1888. "We have come," he said, "pardon the homely phrase—we have come to stay!" He had builded well!

For many years, at each succeeding meeting, both President Morais and the Trustees of the Seminary had urged the importance of enlarging



and strengthening the faculty; and had emphasized the necessity of an adequate endowment fund for this and other purposes. When Kohut died, the need and duty became more pressing. The report of the President of the Seminary Association for 1896, describes the type of man needed for "Resident Dean."

Mr. Blumenthal there said:

"Such a man as we need must be a scholar in the true sense—one who is imbued with the scientific spirit of learning. He must be a gentleman, manifesting ever the finest courtesy and securing it in return from others. He must have the tact, training, temperament and experience that are required for an ideal teacher who can win the love, compel the respect and inspire the ambition of his pupils, and finally and beyond all, he must be inspired with a fervent devotion to Judaism as a living religion, demonstrating in his own life and all his walks and ways, the beauty of the Torah and the ideal worth of its teachings. There may not be many such men, but there is at least one; and if but one, we should have him here in this Seminary."

The man thus described and called for is easily recognized—Solomon Schechter.

As far back as June, 1890, being about to visit London, I had been authorized by Dr. Morais and

Mr. Blumenthal to see Mr. Schechter on behalf of the Seminary and ascertain if he would consider an invitation to come to us. Later, Dr. Adler saw him. The story has been told elsewhere; as also, how Cambridge honored itself by inscribing him upon its roll of Doctors, and how some of us in Philadelphia brought him to lecture before Gratz College in 1895, that he might see America and its Jewish leaders, and that they might see and appreciate him. It would almost seem as if Providence had delayed his translation hither "yet seven years," that he might make his wondrous discoveries in the Geniza at Cairo, and that his name might become a tower of strength not alone to our institution, but to Judaism the world over. He came then, not as the colleague Morais had asked for, but as that great teacher's great successor. He was spared to us for too short a time; but the work he did here will long endure!

Morais and Schechter were men of quite different types. Both were of forceful and pronounced individuality; but both were also learned scholars and devout Jews, lovers of God and of His Word—lovers of Israel. If we look at their recorded utterances bearing upon our topic, we find characteristic differences in style and method—but the same dominant thought. I may venture to give it imperfect brief expression thus: Judaism is Faith

made Life. Life without faith may be useful and honorable. Faith not expressed in daily rites may be noble and ennobling. But these are not specifically Jewish. And it is the duty of Jews to know and preserve Judaism.

Morais said: "At the basis of our Seminary lies the belief that Moses was in all truth inspired by the Living God to promulgate laws for the government of a people sanctified to an imprescriptible mission; that these laws, moral and ceremonial, . . . of necessity broadly formulated, needed in all ages an oral interpretation. The traditions of the fathers are therefore coeval with the written statutes of the five Holy Books.

"It follows, then, that the Bible constitutes the primary subject of our students' tuition; Mishna and Talmud are studied by them as an indispensable corollary. Those branches of sacred literature taught by men whose characters we believe to be unassailable, must inspire the scholars with love for their religion and reverence for the ancients who honestly handed it down. To awaken such sentiments and spread them far and wide, we have raised this high school of Jewish learning in the metropolis of America . . .

"Heartfelt, indeed, is our devotion to the constitution of the country that has levelled inequalities and clothed Israelites with all the



franchises of freemen. We cherish the kindest feelings for our fellow-citizens of every creed who do right according to the dictates of their conscience; but profoundly impressed with the charge imposed by the everliving Legislator on the imperishable seed of Abraham, we will provide against the abandonment of God-ordained behests by the Hebrews who dwell in this Union. Our Seminary has constituted itself a church militant . . . to fight scepticism arrayed against the history and traditions that have made Israel deathless."

Schechter says, in speaking of the foundation and charter of the Seminary:

"And this means that the religion in which the Jewish ministry should be trained must be specifically and purely Jewish, without any alloy or adulteration. Judaism must stand or fall by that which distinguishes it from other religions, as well as by that which it has in common with them. Judaism is not a religion which does not oppose itself to anything in particular. Judaism is opposed to any number of things, and distinctly says: 'thou shalt not.' It permeates the whole of your life. It demands control over all your actions, and it interferes even with your *ménu*. It sanctifies the seasons and regulates your history,

both in the past and in the future. Above all, it teaches that disobedience is the strength of sin. It insists upon the observance of both the spirit and the letter; spirit without letter belongs to the species known to the mystics as "nude souls," wandering about in the universe without balance and without consistency, the play of all possible currents and changes in the atmosphere. In a word, Judaism is absolutely incompatible with the abandonment of the Torah . . ."

And in another place:

"This is a test applicable to all ages and to all countries; to the New World as well as to the Old. There is nothing in American citizenship which is incompatible with our observance of the dietary laws, our sanctifying the Sabbath, our fixing a Mezuzah on our doorposts, our refraining from leavened bread on Passover, or our perpetuating any other law essential to the preservation of Judaism. On the other hand, it is now generally recognized by the leading thinkers that the institutions and observances of religion are part of its nature, a fact that the moribund rationalism of a half century ago failed to realize . . ."

I would like to read more, but will not impose further upon your patience. Just two additional

words from Isaac Leeser, however, to show, again, the essential unity of thought among those who prepared the way and those who founded and continued the Seminary. First, this:

“For twenty years” (this was in 1849, and refers to his entrance into the ministry in 1828) “have we urged the subject of religious education as paramount to all other spiritual improvements. No reformation is equal to it; no sacrifices are too great for it; and whilst we have the power to write or to speak shall it continue to be the theme of our declamation. Compared to it, all the efforts of reform, whether it be to shorten the prayers, to abolish certain observances, or to have instrumental music at worship, are but as the antics of a baby at play. All of them combined, or each singly, never yet converted a single soul, or withdrew one from the path of sin.”

And then, this:

“It is evident that something must be done to supply the demand for religious training. Many congregations are now seeking for proper ministers, who can speak of the word of God in the English language; and where are they? Congregations are daily multiplying; there is a pressure in Europe which will drive many away from their native lands to seek for a

shelter here, where they can seek a living without the dread of war, of popular tumult or of the oppression of tyrants. If not themselves, their children will require to be instructed, not in the language of France, of Italy, of Germany, or of Russia, but in the vernacular of this country. The ministers we require, therefore, prospectively, if not at the present day, must be those educated in this land, in the midst of us; known to us from their youth for probity of character, and an elevated moral standing. All we require to accomplish this are ample means . . . the Constitution and the laws give us full right and power."

The early efforts to bring Schechter here had failed, chiefly for want of means. But with Blumenthal's death, following hard upon the deaths of Kohut and Morais, the need for him became imperative; and a few liberal, broad-minded, magnificently munificent Jews of New York and Philadelphia, were awakened to the importance of definite and prompt action.

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, as was said a moment ago, had never been incorporated as such. It was therefore open for those who had contributed the substantial beginnings of an adequate endowment fund for the perpetuation and enlargement of the Seminary, to charter themselves



and certain selected persons under that title. This was accordingly done, with the full knowledge and consent of the friends of the school and the trustees of the Seminary Association. The charter was granted by the State of New York, February 20, 1902. It sets forth the purposes of the Corporation as "the propagation of the tenets of the Jewish religion, the cultivation of Hebrew literature, the pursuit of biblical and archeological research, the advancement of Jewish scholarship, the establishment of a library, and the education and training of Jewish rabbis and teachers."

And thus was prepared the second merger.

The report of the Jewish Theological Seminary Association for 1896 contains the last address made by the founder of the Seminary at a meeting of its supporters. He cites the tradition that "at the deathbed of King David, his officers and ministers uttered this wish: May God make the name of Solomon more famous than thy name and raise his throne above thy throne." Disclaiming equality of theme, he makes a like wish for his successors in the Seminary. In the same spirit, the young men and elders, richer in devotion and enthusiasm than in purse or influence, who had dugged the ground, laid the foundations and set the corner-stone, willingly yielded to more capable hands the work of completing the building. The survivors

of them rejoice that the wish so beautifully expressed by the chief builder has been fulfilled.

On April 14, 1902, the Jewish Theological Seminary Association transferred to the new corporation, and the latter received, a Seminary in active existence; a building; the Morais library; many students; a number of instructors; and certain trust funds—but above all, a quenchless inspiration, a vivifying hope, an honorable tradition, an unchanged purpose.

That transfer took place under this agreement: "The Association is hereby merged into the Seminary. The Seminary adopts the provisions of Article II of the Constitution of the Association, as hereinbefore set forth."

"Article II," thus cited, reads as follows:

"The purpose of this association being the preservation in America of the knowledge and practice of historical Judaism, as contained in the Laws of Moses and expounded by the Prophets and Sages of Israel in Biblical and Talmudical writings, it proposes in furtherance of its general aim, the following specific objects:

"1. The establishment and maintenance of a Jewish Theological Seminary for the training of rabbis and teachers.

"2. The attainment of such cognate purposes as may upon occasion be deemed appropriate."

And to this last sentence I would call special attention in the very few minutes that I shall continue to talk.

As it fell to my lot to draft the constitution of the Jewish Theological Seminary Association in 1886, I am perhaps qualified to explain in part, what was in view and expressed by the phrase "cognate purposes." It included a library—that had been begun; a body of research students—and even toward that, something had been accomplished; the publication of scientific contributions—and of that there had been a beginning; an extended union of Congregations of conservative tendencies, formed about the nucleus of its constituent bodies—and this, indeed, had been set forth as a definite object in *The Jewish Record* editorial of December, 1885, previously mentioned. But there was also something more—something big.

It was said at the beginning of this talk that the Jewish Theological Seminary is the partial realization of a great vision; a vision beheld by the *Anshe Emunah*—the great men and the men of great faith—of former generations. The vision is that of a Jewish University—with the Seminary as its Divinity School. A Jewish University in America! Not alone to train ministers and teachers, but so to educate the Jewish laymen of this

land that there shall never be lacking among American citizens of the Jewish faith the knowledge of their history, their literature, their ancient language, and their present duty; so to imbue the Jews of America with love for their faith and reverence for its law, that the Jewish life shall continue to be lived by them, as by their fathers.

Thus wrote Isaac Leeser in 1849:

“We ask those whom God has blessed with plenty, with superabundance, with more than they or their families can conveniently consume, whether they will not do that for Judaism which so many Christians do for Christianity? In every direction colleges and schools are rising up, even in the far off Wisconsin . . . supported by the munificence of churches or individual endowments. Jews alone stand aloof; they do enough if their children are taught what can be picked up at public or private schools founded and controlled by others. They seem to feel no shame at the humiliating spectacle of their spiritual dependence . . . Now we should like to know where the rich Jews are, of whom this country has its full proportion, that they do nothing to glorify their religion. It would not, surely, be difficult to do what is needed, if they only felt correctly and justly on this all-important subject.”



“But why”—do you ask—“is it necessary to teach history, languages, science, mathematics, philosophy, in a specifically Jewish school? Are not existing colleges sufficient? Does religion or its absence influence the teaching of scientific theory or of demonstrable fact?”

Yes, my friends. Science and history and philosophy are perverted where religion is absent. We have too sad an illustration of that before our eyes today.

Schechter quotes, somewhere, what is related in a Midrash of Cain—that before he wrought the murder of his brother, he said: “There is no Judge; there is no judgment; there is no future; there is no punishment; there is no reward.” Isn’t that the word that has gone out from the laboratories of Jena and Leipzig and Berlin? “There is no God; there is no Judge; there is no law; there is no right or wrong; there is no responsibility; there is no punishment. Let us pervert our science to the service of evil; let us establish the Kingdom of Hell upon earth!”

If you would avoid that, you must teach science in a religious atmosphere; and a religious atmosphere for Jews is but one thing. Not *any* religion—not an eclectic religiosity—but Judaism. Judaism, that is Faith made Life!

“If you are everything, you are nothing.” You must be something—something positive, something

definite. That is why Jacob Solis wanted the boys and girls who were to be taught agriculture and the mechanical and domestic arts to be reared in a Jewish home and with Jewish learning. That was the object of Noah's proposals; of Simson's and of Gratz's gifts.

A great Jewish school of all knowledge! To educate Jews—but also to preserve Judaism! That was the vision of Leeser. That was the dream of Morais. That was the hope of Schechter. That is our prayer. May God grant it.













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